The Community Concert Association

Presents

THE LESLIE BELL SINGERS

DR. LESLIE R. BELL, *Director*

1951 1952

ORGANIZED in 1939 as a girls' choir, the Leslie Bell Singers first came into prominence as a result of its troop entertainment during World War II. Thousands of English and Canadian service men came to know this group and to vote it the most popular musical feature of the camps.

Since then, they have won international acclaim: Their weekly network broadcast for Canadian General Electric boasts the greatest listening audience in the history of Canadian radio music; their number of American listeners in northern U. S. A. is countless; the popularity of their many records has resulted in continually renewed contracts with RCA Victor; their films have had long runs in major cities of the world and one was awarded first prize at the International Film Festival in Venice, 1949.

The choir is well-known on the Canadian concert stage; they have appeared with top personalities in the musical and entertainment field and their guest appearances on the NBC and CBS networks won high praise from "Variety" and other American journals.

By carefully auditioning thousands of girls, Dr. Bell has accumulated voices of unusual range which allow the group all the scope of a mixed chorus. Its consistent use of *a capella* music has won it the three qualities for which it is famous — tonal balance, accurate intonation, and flawless diction. These resources along with dramatic arrangements make possible effects never before associated with treble groups.

Leslie Bell, arranger, composer, director, journalist, teacher, and public speaker, has aptly been described as "the busiest man in Canadian music." Turning from a professional career as an instrumentalist and conductor to University teaching, he is one of the leading figures in the development of Canadian school music and is responsible for several authorized text books. Utilizing his knowledge of orchestral tone colour and dramatic effect, his arrangements have widened the potential field of choralism. Many of these are heard on the networks

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and in the school of the United States, as well as in all parts of the world. American musical circles know Dr. Bell also as a guest conductor and speaker.

In spite of his busy life, Dr. Bell has found time to win himself not only a doctor's degree in Music but a Master of Arts in English literature and, as an expressive outlet for this second love, he writes a weekly newspaper column on music which has an enormous following.

This tour is the introduction to the American concert stage of this famous Canadian ensemble, which has been showered with such epithets as "enchantment, glamour, beauty and choral virtuosity."

Program

I.

Music for Worship

Art owes an incalculable debt to religion. For countless centuries, man has used literature, music, painting, and architecture as a means of expressing devotion to his Maker and in so doing has realized his greatest artistic triumphs. The following works are contrasting examples of the contributions made by the churches of Western civilization.

Ein' feste Burg . . . . . *Luther*
(1483-1546)

Martin Luther, leader of the Reformation and a fine musician, not only collected and arranged old hymn tunes for congregational singing but wrote original ones. His chorale, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,* has been called the battle song of the Reformation and is found in the official hymn book of every Protestant body.

Kyrie, from "Missa Alma Pater" . . . . . *Gregorian*
(11th Century)

Kyrie, from "Missa Papae Marcelli" . . . . . *Palestrina*
(1525-1594)

The history of music through the Middle Ages to the Renaissance is almost entirely the history of Catholic church music and no church has had in its service such a host of great musicians. These two *Kyrie* settings illustrate the development of Roman Catholic liturgical music from simple unison plainsong to the highly contrapuntal technique of Palestrina, through whom *a capella* singing achieved its crowning glory.

Our Father Which Art in Heaven . . . . . *Tschaikowsky*
(1840-1893)

Because the Greek Orthodox church has consistently banned the use of musical instruments in worship, the art of unaccompanied singing in Eastern Europe has reached a peak of perfection. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Russians departed from the traditional plainsong of the Greek Orthodox church to introduce harmony. This setting of *The Lord's Prayer* is characteristically Russian and especially Tschaikowsky (with reminiscences of his "1812" Overture).

Eli, Eli . . . . . *Hebrew*

The countless arrangements of this great Hebrew chant have lost in obscurity its origin. Partly in Hebrew (the language of the synagogue) and partly in Yid-

dish (the language of the people), *Eli, Eli* expresses intensely the sorrow that years of persecution have brought to the Jews. Coupled with this emotion is a note of triumph and exultation — with praises of the Lord God of Israel, the Deliverer.

Dark Valley
Rocka Ma Soul . . . . . *Negro Spirituals*

Negro spirituals are not traditional liturgy but the simple song of faith of the American negro. His background has caused him to develop a type of hymn — sometimes deeply melancholy, sometimes hysterically joyous.

Intermission

II.

Folk-Music of North America

By bringing to light thousands of wonderful songs sung by the peoples of this continent, scholars have modified the former assumption that all genuine folk music belonged to the Old World. And, while most of the melodies had their origin in Europe, the changes that they have undergone through the years have given them a truly American flavor.

Rhapsody on Newfoundland Folk-Songs . . . . . *Bell*

The folk-music of Newfoundland, Canada's newest province, is all too-little known. Cut off from the rest of the world by a rocky, twisted coastline and an uninhabited interior, the Newfoundlanders have learned to entertain themselves and a frequently recurring theme is that of the sea and its place in the lives of the fishermen. Several of these melodies were discovered by Dr. Bell when visiting Newfoundland in 1947.

Jesous Ahatonia . . . . . *Ontario Indian Carol*

Students of Canadian history know well the story of the martyrdom by the Indians of Father Brebeuf, one of the Jesuit priests who established a mission on the shores of Lake Huron in the seventeenth century. This carol of the Christmas story is in a language the Indians could understand — the Christ Child is a papoose wrapped in rabbit skin, the wise men, Indian hunters, etc.

The Unconstant Lover
Lollytoodum . . . . . *American Folk-Songs*

The description of the unconstant lover who is "worser than a thief" and tells "more lies than the crossties on a railroad" appears frequently in American folk-songs, notably "On Top of Old Smoky." The much gayer "Lollytoodum" is the story of a young girl who, against her widowed mother's wishes, seeks a husband but her eventual conquest of a wealthy suitor causes her mother to change her mind and she too enters the matrimonial field.

Youppe, Youppe sur la Riviere
A la Clair Fontaine
Alouette . . . . *French Canadian Folk-Songs*

The French Canadians, a strongly nationalistic people, can boast of thousands of folk-songs, and these three are probably the most popular. The first two are done in the characteristically French Canadian manner, while the well-known "Alouette" has been given a rather different treatment.

Intermission

III.

Music of Many Moods

The following numbers are selected from the vast repertoire which the Leslie Bell Singers have presented on their weekly network broadcasts and which also have found particular favor with Canadian concert audiences.

Clair de Lune . . . . . *Debussy*

Debussy's understanding of the female voice is revealed in his sensitive writing for women and the mystic feminine quality of *Clair de Lune,* although a piano work, justifies a transcription. In order not to disturb the composers original intent, it is sung as a vocalise without words and is an example of a radio technique frequently used by the Bell Singers.

Echo Song . . . . . *Di Lasso*

One of the great sixteenth century composers of religious music, Orlando di Lasso possessed a sense of humor which is displayed in his secular works. This is an example of skillful and delicate contrapuntal writing.

Ave Maria . . . . . *Schubert*

This arrangement of the *Ave Maria,* for solo voice and chorus, is one of the most popular items in the Bell Singers' repertoire.

Le Fiacre . . . . . *Sablon*

Here, sung in French, is the story of a coquettish young wife who had a rendezvous in a coach but was discovered by her jealous husband. The voice of the coachman and the clopping of the horse's hooves form a vivid part of the arrangement.

Irving Berlin Medley

The songs of Irving Berlin date from the early years of this century to the present day and constitute a picture of the events and thoughts of the last fifty years. A Canadian choir pays tribute to a great American in this medley of his best-known songs.

Choral Arrangements: Leslie R. Bell, M.A., Mus.D.

Assistant Conductor: Miss Doris Wallace, A.R.C.M.

Personnel: Miss Dorothy Walter, B.A.

Assistant Arranger & Librarian: Miss Margaret Zeidman, Mus.B.

Medical Attendant: Miss Jennie Johnson, Reg.N.

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